

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Whites Learning the Indian Way

by

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Crow Spreading Wings

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## ABSTRACT

This ethnography of communication documents face-to-face communication events and utterances between one elderly American Indian teacher and white students to whom she teaches Indian knowledge and skills.

Language use differences in three areas of the data, establish that the learning situation in which the interactions occur is bicultural. The data and analysis provide an opportunity to study the relationships between the complexity of meaning during a task-oriented process (working-on-hides), and the complexity of the lexical utterances within the task.

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I recognize Agnes Vanderburg, and the late Etta Adams, among the many other people who encouraged me to practice the Indian way. Glad I am that Agnes' and my friendship survived my emergence as an ethnographer.

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Topics and Definitions

This ethnography of communication documents face-to-face interactions at the Agnes Vanderburg Culture Camp located at Valley Creek Meadow in the mountains near Arlee, Montana on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Through frame analysis (Fillmore 1976) of the "culture-specific schemata" (Kintsch and Greene 1978) occurring in language use during learning events, I will establish that cultural differences are a factor in communication events at camp.

At Valley Creek, Indians and white people camp together and learn Indian ways taught by Agnes Vanderburg, an elderly full-blood of the Montana Salish. The camp community uses the terms "Indian", and "non-Indian" or "white", to identify the two groups individual campers come from. I define the situation at camp as an Indian learning environment.

"Indian learning environment" designates a situation defined by the local Indian community as an Indian place to learn Indian ways -- a situation known as available to would-be students. This Indian learning environment exists independently of non-Indian school systems, organization, or financing. Its curriculum and administration are



completely in Indian hands. As such, it is unfamiliar to the non-Indian arrivee.

"Indian learning environment" in this study means both the physical milieu and the moment-by moment learning process happening at the Agnes Vanderburg Culture Camp. It happens on Indian land; it begins when Agnes moves to Valley Creek each spring. As the Indian learning environment creates itself, ethnic origin of campers does not affect the "Indianness". Camp is an on-going process; the situation remains in place as "Agnes' Camp" (other terms used interchangeably for this specific Indian learning environment include: "camp" and "Valley Creek".) Once Agnes has set up camp, the (community defined) Indian-ness does not seem to be affected by who is there, number of campers, or whether the camper population is weighted toward Indian or white.

Thus we find a situation where whites are learning from an Indian teacher in her own environment. My commitment is to study non-Indians interacting with Indian people. For the purposes of this thesis, a non-Indian learner shall be considered to be a person of European (white) cultural, social and so-called racial heritage. I apply this definition to myself and to all white individuals who came to Valley Creek while I was there. Some individuals were from Europe (Germany, France), others were European-derived North Americans.

I am aware that for many Indian individuals who come to Agnes' camp from the Flathead and other places, much of their experience with learning environments has been in non-Indian contexts. But many other experiences in these peoples' lives have occurred in Indian communities (cf. Philips 1983:4; 16-20). Questions of to what degree their approach to learning has been affected by their exposure to white schools, and whether they therefore may be considered socialized non-Indian learners, are beyond the scope of this paper. Herein, these individuals are characterized as Indian learners. For data and analysis, focus remains on the non-Indian learner interacting with the Indian teacher and milieu.

My primary linguistic data is gathered from language use occurring during Agnes' teaching of hide-work to her white students. The most common referent used at camp for the task to be learned is "tanning". For white English speakers, the phrases "tanning" and "making buckskin" are often fraught with attitudes and connotations that include: images of gore, slime, rotten stink; women chewing on skin. One of the first statements Agnes made to me about hide-work was: "They [whites] always ask you if you chew the hide. Maybe some tribes do, I don't know. But we don't." (AV pers. comm. 1977). To avoid activating those connotations, I've chosen to use the process-oriented

phrases "hide-work" and "working-on-hides". The word "tanning" is reserved for use at one particular stage of the hide-work process.

## 2. Anthropological Themes and Applications

Relative to the wider theoretical concerns of Linguistic Anthropology, my work in these pages contributes data and analysis that apply to consideration of a question raised by Ronald and Suzanne B.K. Scollon in their Linguistic Convergence: an Ethnography of Speaking at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta (1979). The on-going question is, is there a core of meanings that exists independently of language? (op.cit.:140-145).

My ethnography and findings also address communication issues in Indian-white relations, particularly in education. Susan Philips argues that cultural differences in organization and transmission of information at the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, cause difficulty for Indian students in white classrooms (op.cit.:4). Through looking at factors of language use that underlie specific communication events, Bauman and Sherzer suggest that ethnography of speaking and communication may uncover and shed light on "problem situations which stem from covert conflicts between different ways of speaking" (1975:115). The "problem situations" addressed indirectly in my study are those of Indian students involved in white schools.

Finally, I offer this thesis as a contribution to the erosion of the Vanishing American myth, a notion that pervades popular white culture, and sometimes influences Anthropology.

## Chapter I

### THEORY

#### 1. General Theoretical Issues

The field of anthropology represented herein is Linguistic Anthropology. This study is presented using the vehicle ethnography of communication, a mode of study delineated by Dell Hymes in the early 1960's. Philipsen & Carbaugh's comprehensive bibliography provides a list of "fieldwork published since 1962 which is responsive to Hymes's call for ethnographic studies in communication" (Philipsen & Carbaugh 1986:387).

Ethnography of communication involves the cultural, social, and cognitive organization pertinent to situations within which face-to-face interaction occurs. Language use emerges in the context of these life-situations (Bauman and Sherzer 1975:96).

The ethnographer of communication recognizes that in real life, language is never by itself. Language occurs in social settings, with idiosyncratic and group variations that affect not only successful communication, but also negotiation of group membership, transmission of cultural knowledge, and other systematic cultural processes.

Description and analysis of the circumstances while talk falls out, require the researcher to be cognizant of ethnographic concerns like context, meaning, and knowledge: what a person has to know in order to function in a given speech interaction. The observer must also watch for the sociocultural dimension of talk--how talk happens in a given cultural setting.

In their definitive article on the ethnography of speaking, Bauman and Sherzer recognize the sociocultural dimension of talk. They posit that language use conveys sociocultural meaning. The ethnographer of language use observes the "means of speaking". These include "...linguistic repertoire, genres, acts, and frames--the building blocks out of which utterances are fashioned." (Bauman and Sherzer 1975:103). Language, and how it is used, "is, among other things, a symbolic code by which messages are transmitted and understood, by which information is encoded and classified, and through which events are announced and interpreted" (Witherspoon 1977:3). Social relationships and intergroup communication are two areas conducive to sociolinguistics and ethnography of language use (Gumperz 1975:xiii). Bauman and Sherzer summarize the potential application of this type of study:



"Through awareness of and sensitivity to the socioexpressive dimension of speaking, and to intergroup differences in ways of speaking within heterogeneous communities, ethnographic investigators are particularly well equipped to clarify those problem situations which stem from covert conflicts between different ways of speaking...(1975:115).

## 2. Specific Theoretical Considerations

The primary theory that I am espousing in this study is that of cultural difference. Through "...a consideration of the processes of communication" using frames (Fillmore 1976:23), I explore communication patterns of whites and Indians. Within each group, "culture-specific schemata" (Kintsch and Greene 1978:1), appear in utterances and stories. These organizational patterns mark each culture. European-derived speech conventions require an organization pattern of threes (Kintsch and Greene 1978:1-2; Atkinson 1984 passim). American Indian cultures use a "principle of fours" (Kintsch and Greene 1978:2; Witherspoon 1977:166). These three- and four- structures of speech are a "... surface structure of ... a set of operations..." that "...emanate from deeper level metaphysical assumptions" about reality (Witherspoon 1977:4). That is, language use reflects the user's universe.

I have chosen to study communication between the two groups white, and Indian, in a specific situation. This

approach has precedent in the field of sociolinguistics. Influential precedents for my study were Susan Philips, and R. and S. Scollon. Philips' The Invisible Culture (1983) comprehensively explores the cross-cultural communication differences between Anglo teachers and Indian students on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. At Agnes' camp, the white students and Indian teacher face similar communication differences as Philips' white teachers and Indian students faced.

Ronald and Suzanne Scollon's work at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, used one narrator performing one story in several languages and settings. Their analysis led them to define "bush" (Indian) and "modern" consciousness (Anglo). These "reality sets" are " ...the cognitive context..." in which the multilingual and multicultural community functions at Fort Chipewyan (Scollon and Scollon 1979:177). Additionally, the Scollons' research provides precedent for me, as I look at one teacher, her narrative performance while teaching, and the non-Indian students' interaction with her stories.

Among many other ethnographers of language use in education (see Hymes 1980; Spindler 1982), John Gumperz and Eleanor Herasimchuk (1975) studied classroom interaction within white culture; their work provided insight for me in watching the assumptions about learning processes that white learners bring to any learning environment.

Edward Hall's concept of high- and low-context cultures has proven useful in studying interaction between Indians and whites while learning/teaching. Hall classifies American Indian culture as high-context (Hall 1976:39). He classifies white culture as low-context (ibid.:127-128).

High-context cultures are cultural systems in which everyone already knows what is going on. As a result, there is very little explanatory discourse: "...simple messages with deep meaning flow freely" (ibid.:39).

Low context cultures use frequent explanatory discourse: information is verbalized rather than assumed to be widely shared. Messages are complex. Members of these cultural systems expect to be told about what is going on.

### 3. Data and Analysis: Theoretical Issues

When I set out to do ethnolinguistic research at Camp, I went through much the same progression that Ronald and Suzanne Scollon trace in their Linguistic Convergence (1979). The Scollons' study of talk at Fort Chipewyan originated from their interest in previous linguists' work with the Chipewyan language. They discovered that the multilingual nature of the speech community in Fort Chip led them away from sociolinguistics toward cognition and ethnolinguistics. "Where we sought an explanation for the

continued presence of Chipewyan, Cree, English, and French, people in the community were seeking an explanation for the insistence on the use of a single language by such outside institutions as the school and the church" (ibid.:11). At this point, they understood that they were going to have to take as valid the native (in the sense of the entire community's) point of view. Once they began tracking on just what that viewpoint was, they moved rapidly away from the traditional linguistic framework.

My own research plans shifted from a study of Indian English (Leap, passim) to a study of communication events that involve cultural meaning, narrative, and organization of knowledge.

As the Scollons moved into cognition and worldview, they abandoned the sociolinguistic approach that would delineate sociolinguistic groupings or stratifications: "...we feel the explanation for linguistic convergence at Fort Chipewyan lies in the characteristic way in which things are known by people in that community" (Scollon and Scollon 1979:11). "That is, our explanation of linguistic convergence now looks to the worldview of the speakers. Thus our work which began in a sociolinguistic framework has become decidedly more ethnolinguistic than sociolinguistic" (ibid.:11).

When they put the data together, they realized that the linguistic study of the narrative [their data] could

not be undertaken without also pursuing the cognitive. The story was told by a person with a personal history, a performance history in the community; he had listeners, he could tell the story in English or Chipewyan, fast or slow, gesturing or not, and he could tell it in different locations (for example, they contrasted the telling of the same story in the narrator's house, and in the Scollon's house...).

During their research, they were becoming more and more aware of how what they call "reality set" (ibid.:vii) underlies the linguistic components of Fort Chipewyan talk. Worldview became the basis for their analysis and interpretation of all their data. "That is, we have decided to treat linguistic convergence as problematical and are seeking to explain that by reference to worldview." (ibid.:11). The Scollons tie linguistic aspects of narrative to general learning processes and worldview: "Language as part of the knowable world is susceptible to being affected by the assumptions the knower makes about this world and by the way in which things are learned" (ibid.:206).

Story narrative plays a major role in the teaching at Camp. Richard Bauman discusses "verbal art as performance, based upon an understanding of performance as a mode of speaking." (1977:3). Bauman states that when verbal art

appears as communication, "...there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor, 'interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey.'" (ibid.:9). The ethnographic perspective, Bauman stresses, must be that verbal art is not a deviation from any "normal" form of speech. This perspective "...rests instead on a multifunctional view of language use" recognizing the nature of verbal art as included among the diverse means of speaking available in a given speech community (ibid.:17).

Bauman then provides a general list of communicative means that key performance. These were useful to me in recognizing both when performance occurred, and, because the keying in Agnes' teaching is not always the same as what non-Indians are accustomed to, also in analysis of the non-Indian learners' reception of her teaching. Bauman also discusses patterning of performance -- who "has access to" (ibid.:30) the performance role, and points out that the role is neither necessarily ceremonial nor the only role an individual may play. Bauman's final theoretical point rests on "...the creative aspect of optative performance", and develops the theme of "the emergent quality of all performance" (ibid.:37).

Hide-work and how it is taught through performance, is an excellent vehicle for studying emergence. Janet



Dougherty and C.W. Keller's (1982) study of blacksmithing provides a theoretical basis for understanding that hide-work involves task-oriented constellations of knowledge. Hide-work, and its learning process involves the transmission of knowledge that is organized into constellations, knowledge not retrievable from lists or general classifications. "Constellations are ephemeral, being pulled together and held in mind only as long as appropriate for a given task. There will be individual variation in the specific materials and tools incorporated in to sequence of operations. Any individual tool or material [or motion, in hide work] may occur in multiple constellations" (Dougherty and Keller 1982:768).

In hide-work, as with blacksmithing, there are named distinctions, and lists, but these "cannot be taken to indicate a ... fixed set of units within which the blacksmith [hide-worker] is constrained to operate" (ibid.:771). Teaching the "task-oriented, practical creativity" (ibid.:772) of turning a hide into buckskin is more than teaching a skill. It also introduces a student to the conceptual organizations (constellations) of hide-work knowledge. The domain hide-work is central to Flathead culture, both material and cognitive. Learning hide-work involves immersion in a total cultural pattern; the process changes the person as well as the hide.

The constantly shifting, "productive organization of information on the basis of a particular context" (ibid.:765), is communicated by Agnes via narrative performance, procedural information, and encouragement. During research, I began to notice the corresponding response/experience of the non-Indian learner during the three kinds of events.

Dell Hymes (with Courtney Cazden) offers insight for linking cognition, emergence, and narrative, in his article "Narrative thinking and story-telling rights: a folklorist's clue to a critique of education" (Hymes and Cazden 1980). Their premise is that narrative is a way of thought, a universal in human speaking (ibid.:131), and some cultures weight narratives differently. Anglo culture devalues narrative, preferring terms and definitions.

In the Native American culture represented at Warm Springs Indian Reservation, Hymes found that performance and text are grounded in "a narrative view of life. That is to say, a view of life as a potential source of narrative." Bits of experience became "an event to be told, told and retold until it took shape as a narrative, one that might become a narrative told by others (ibid.:135). The use and valuation of narrative in Anglo and Indian culture is a factor in whether Agnes' student "gets" a particular teaching event. Whites and Indians esteem narrative differently. Cazden asserts, "Although

narratives have an honorable history as 'the temporizing of essence' (Burke 1945:430), they are often denigrated, particularly by social scientists as 'mere anecdotes'" (Hymes and Cazden 1980:128). She notes that in university settings, use of narrative is differently acknowledged by the professor than are verbal statements of abstraction and/or conceptualization (ibid.:127).

Hymes extends Cazden's observations: "We tend to depreciate narrative as a form of knowledge, and personal narrative particularly, in contrast to other forms of discourse considered scholarly, scientific, technical, or the like." (ibid.:129). He observes that students who come into an [Anglo] educational setting from homes or cultures where narrative performance is a valid way to communicate knowledge, may find narrative excluded (ibid.:132), even considered inferior. In the Indian learning environment for this study, whites are in a situation where their success in learning may depend on catching on to the local validity of narrative, and where, to the self-conscious shock of some, their own actions while learning may suddenly emerge as a story performance for the enlightenment and entertainment of others.

Ethnography of communication is multifaceted by nature. The facets I am emphasizing in this study are: frame analysis (Fillmore 1976), multilingualism, cognition

and worldview (Scollon & Scollon 1979; Dougherty and Keller 1982), narrative performance (Bauman 1977; Hymes 1980; Kintsch and Greene 1978), and cultural differences, particularly in education (Philips 1983; Briggs 1984).

## Chapter II

## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, fieldwork, a pursuit whose nature is human (Georges and Jones 1980:3), happened as an aspect of mutual, ongoing personal relations among myself, Agnes, the Camp, and the Flathead (Montana Salish) People. Scholarly literature on fieldwork includes recognition that the relations between researchers and subjects weave "...the fabric of fieldwork" (ibid.). The human beings involved experience it together.

My interest in doing fieldwork in intercultural communication is personal to my [human] life. The specific location and personnel of this study was chosen deliberately and because of "...the close correlations between [my] personal histories and [my fieldwork plans]." (ibid.:34).

In the late 1940's and early fifties, when I was between three and ten, elderly Flathead people spent time with me. Some took me as their granddaughter, and spent generous, significant time with me. They gave me a Name, and stole my heart. Among this group of people were Agnes and Jerome Vanderburg.

Between 1954 and 1961 my father became acquainted with other Indians around Montana; seasonally we travelled to pow-wows, ceremonies and meetings. Everywhere, the older

women and others liked it when, remembering how my grammas were, I got out my beaded-mountains white buckskin dress, with the other things to complete an outfit, and wore it in the dancing.

Nonetheless, my upbringing, my education in Literature and Drama, my heritage, were thoroughly white culture.

In 1976 I sought and found my grammas among the Flathead people. I moved to the Reservation and spent two years with Agnes, several other elderly women, and their relatives. This relationship was an apprenticeship; my motivation was to learn. I was thinking, and alert.

Agnes and I went camping; I learned hide-work and many other cultural skills. I put myself in their hands; respectful obedience and repeated attention to detail characterized my behaviour. I was glad for the chance to be with them, doing what we did.

I deliberately listened to learn to use language like they did, largely for the purpose of being able to know what to say or do next from within our context together: their Indian Way. We worked-on-hide; we made many things with hide and cloth and beads; we cut meat to dry; visitors came. I listened, and learned to speak, and experienced myself in their Way.



"Learning the nature, structure, constitution, and operation of another culture isn't easy...but sometimes an insight, like a ray of sunlight, seems to open up new vistas of understanding. These vistas of understanding, imagined or real, provide a basis for further conversations through which they are either corrected or sustained. Insights into another culture do not come from idle contemplation or ... questions about and observations of it; they come from intensive and extensive, serious and humorous, involvement in it."

(Witherspoon 1977:6, emphasis in text)

Witherspoon's "moments of insight" happened for me, especially with Agnes while we camped and I learned to work-on-hide. Theatre-trained, I was happily in the cast, practicing. At the same time, I was working-on-hide.

I have since maintained my relationship to Agnes, returning to be with her whenever possible, doing what we do.

In 1984 my formal studies in Anthropology began, and I reflected on how it was for me as a white, learning with Agnes. My first fieldwork at Flathead was done for an independent study in the summer of 1984 and resulted in a componential analysis of working-on-hide semantics. Later, I had to consider carrying out the research for this study.

As I considered the notion of doing research at Flathead, I was concerned lest "anthropology" subvert my lifetime relationships in the community. This concern became a part of my decision to study white people

interacting with Indians, rather than any aspect of Indian culture per se. I decided to study my own people in relationship to Indians. A study of whites learning the Indian way was possible because I have been a non-Indian learner in my own life.

When I approached people in the Flathead community about this study, they were intrigued and pleased that I had noticed that whites have something to learn regarding relating to Indians. Support and co-operation was made available; hope was expressed that this work would contribute to understanding between Indians and non-Indians, particularly in the field of education.

Permission for my thesis project was granted by the tribal council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in 1985, with the proviso that I stay under the supervision of an advisory group selected by the Flathead Culture Committee. The advisors are: Agnes Vanderburg; Ron Therriault, head of the Native American Studies Department at Salish-Kootenai Community College, former Tribal Chairman; and Clarence Woodcock, Chairman of the Flathead Culture Committee. At the beginning of the formal research stage, I interviewed each of my advisors about Native teaching methods, intercultural learning issues for both Natives and non-Natives, and what the advisors would like to see brought out. Intermittently I have checked with the advisors about both general and specific aspects

of this study. Drafts of the writing progress have been sent for review and advice as they became available.

In 1985 I spent six weeks at Valley Creek; in 1986 I was there five weeks in all, during two separate trips. While I was at camp, I participated fully in all aspects of my personal role there. I worked-on-hide, made a buckskin dress, enjoyed the mountains, did beadwork, mothered my child, and camped. My thesis project was happening too, as part of what I was currently doing in the world outside. Doing "my research", I was an observant participator. Once in a while I made written notes, publicly or privately. At night in my private enclave, I recorded muttered observations of events. In groups and one-to-one, the tape-recorder was sometimes on hand; eleven ninety-minute tapes were recorded and later transcribed. For the most part, my friends from both cultures accepted my ethnographer-self with wry humour and tolerance.

## CHAPTER III

## THE INDIAN TEACHER AND HER LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

## 1. Agnes

"I never thought I'd be famous," Agnes chuckles. "I just lived my life the way my folks taught me. It just happened."

Agnes Adams was born in 1901 on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana. Her people are known variously as Flathead Indians, Montana Salish, and Interior Salish. They call themselves the Salish. Agnes grew up during a time of allotted, shared habitation with homesteading whites on the Reservation. Acculturation was assumed (among whites) to have occurred (Fahey 1974:xi; Turney-High 1937:6).

John Fahey asserts in his book about historical contact between whites and Flatheads, that "The Flatheads... do not have an unbroken, sacrosanct cultural link with some ancient period..." (Fahey 1974:ix). While I cannot comment on "sacrosanct", I suggest that he may not have been considering women's lives. Agnes' personal cultural roots directly touch precontact times. Her grandmother, with whom she was extremely close, was born in 1846, five years after the first priests came to the Flathead people. This grandmother was named "Woman", and

was respected as a repository of women's knowledge (AV pers. comm. 1977). Woman (also known as Sack Woman) died in 1957, in full possession of her mental faculties. Thus, until Agnes was fifty-six, she had the influence and guidance of a grandmother who was raised by those who lived the ancient Way.

Assimilation pressures were intense during Agnes' youth. The Catholic boarding schools were nearly compulsory for Flathead children, and were beginning to be effective in language loss and culture change. Agnes, however, had tuberculosis following grade two, and after her recovery, her parents kept her at home. "I just never went back." (AV pers. comm. 1977). Agnes was interested in the activities and knowledge that her parents and grandmother used in daily life. "My sister [n.] never paid any attention. But I liked to do things with my folks." (AV pers. comm. 1985).

In 1920 Agnes married cattle-rancher Jerome Vanderburg. He was a full-blood who, like she did, enjoyed living the traditional cultural ways. With other members of their generation, they carried out their elders' values through activities both spiritual and secular, and they spoke the Salish language in their home.

Years passed, and Agnes and Jerome became more and more of a minority. Elders died, and by the mid-1940's many younger people were "ashamed of being Indian -- they

were trying to be white" (AV pers. comms. 1977-86). Inter-marriages with the white community were also having the effect of rendering the traditional Salish like the Vanderburgs less influential, both in tribal politics and in life-style.

Agnes and Jerome continued living the way they were brought up, using creative adaptation when appropriate to the prevailing conditions. On one hand, their cattle ranch provided cash flow to interact with the non-Indian community. On the other hand, they followed the seasonal movements of their parents, camping in the mountains, hunting, gathering plant medicines and foods. Season after season, Agnes worked-on-hides.

Their own five children, Jerome's two from his previous marriage, several foster children, and two granddaughters were raised in the cultural skills, language, and ways of thought. Agnes made beaded outfits, sewed tipis, and generally "...just never quit doing what I was supposed to do..." (AV pers. comm. 1977).

Shortly after World War II, the Vanderburgs' cultural expertise was recognized by the University of Montana in nearby Missoula, and they were hired as teachers and consultants for the University's Family Camp. Educators and their [nuclear] families, from all parts of the United States came to Montana in the summers and went camping with



the Vanderburgs. Everyone stayed in tipis and tents, cooked on open fires, and participated in cultural activities like making dry meat, digging roots, and listening to stories. The Family Camp continued for about twenty years, until Jerome's failing health, and the rise in cost of travel caused the University to terminate the program.

After over fifty-three years of marriage, Jerome died in 1974. Agnes' period of adjustment to widowhood included a reduction in outings and socializing. Many younger women of her tribe who traditionally would have come to her for instruction, seemed to be chasing the elusive white lifestyle. Many of her peers were either deceased or inactive for health reasons. She participated in a few community cultural activities when she could get a ride.

She sat by her window, beaded, watched the seasons, and thought about the mountain camp-sites. The Native American Studies program in the St. Ignatius Elementary School sometimes hired her to consult. There she taught children beadwork, sign language, meat-cutting, and other cultural skills. Infrequently, a few women came to her place on the ranch, and worked-on-hides. Most days, she was in her chair by the window, wondering what would happen to the knowledge she carried (AV pers. comm. 1984).

## 2. Agnes and Some Friends Start the Culture Camp

When you cross the creek and get to Agnes' lawn path, her picture window frames fields and trees. She looks out, sees you; you see a laughing smile, welcoming posture.

In autumn 1976, Agnes asked me to visit and stay at her place. We went camping for a few days and had fun. Several weeks later, I moved to the Reservation. During the winter we sewed cloth Indian dresses, made moccasins, beaded, and talked about the mountains. One day I said, innocently, "I'd like to learn how to make buckskin." "We'll go camping in the spring," Agnes said, "and you can work-on-hides." We did. In the summers of 1977 and 1978, we camped at Valley Creek in tent, tipi, and truck toppers. Her relatives often stopped by for coffee or a meal, some camped for a few days. Mainly it was the two of us alone on the mountain. We went root and medicine gathering; Agnes told stories. I listened, learned many things, but "The main thing I taught you, was hides." (AV pers.comm., 1978 and 1986). I the novice (and non-Indian learner), and Agnes the experienced, worked-on-hides.

By spring 1979, I had left the region, but my friend D., also a non-Indian woman, had become interested in working-on-hides. D. got acquainted with Agnes, and together they camped at Valley Creek, 1979 and 1980. During these first four summers, individual community

members, as well as the alternative high school Two Eagle River School and Salish-Kootenai Community College began coming to Agnes at camp. The Flathead Culture Committee visited. Sometimes people would stay for an hour or two (for coffee or lunch, and stories). Other times small family groups would come to stay for a few days with Agnes, work-on-hides, bead, and enjoy being at Valley Creek.

In the spring of 1981 Agnes received funding from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation. The agreement was that she would go camping as usual, welcome visitors and campers as usual, teach hide work and all the other activities she is always doing. Salaries were allocated for Agnes, for one 24-hour security person, and for one cook. From 1981 through 1986, this funding has remained in place. The camp had over 1700 visitors in both 1985 and 1986, according to Agnes' guest book. The camp population is fluid. Some people only stay for a few hours or days, others stay for several weeks; some stay all summer. "The fluxuation of campers recreates the flexibility of summer camp situations in the Flathead groupings of Agnes' youth" (Ridington, pers. comm. 1987).

"Mrs. Vanderburg is active in the tribe as a teacher of traditional ways...She also spends several months a year at a camp where she encourages cultural awareness and people come to learn." (Beck 1982:52). Agnes' teaching has been recognized and honored by the non-Indian community.

In 1982 the Governor of the State of Montana conferred an award on Agnes Vanderburg for preserving cultural heritage. In 1985 the Smithsonian Institute flew Agnes and one of her (Indian) long-time learners to Washington, D.C., where Agnes was the principal Native elder at the American Folklife Festival.

Indian-side, Agnes is often invited to travel and speak, she is visited by people from all over, and teaches two local beading classes. Agnes has reached the status of publicly recognized cultural expert, in both communities (Indian and non-Indian). "The reigning elder" (Supera, pers. comm. 1987), she and her knowledge are available to anyone who takes the action to come and see her.

Non-Indians travel to her camp from all parts of North America, as well as West Germany, France, Switzerland, and Japan. She is unfailingly welcoming and cheerful to all. Agnes enjoys watching what her visitors will do; she is glad for another summer at Valley Creek.

"Agnes does not advocate traditional ways as the only way, but encourages anyone and everyone wishing to learn the old ways." (Beck 1982:96) Agnes does not promote an unreasonable return to "the old ways" -- she lives in a house, camps in a trailer, likes her washing machine, enjoys shopping. Her daily activities are an example of how to use modern life and still pursue traditional

activities. She values what she knows, "...what I learned from my folks". Whenever you see Agnes, she is doing -- beading, sewing, sorting berries. She'll show you if you are there and want to learn.

Agnes says, "What I got [know], I want to give away before I go [die]. I don't care who learns it -- what color they are. If they'll do it, I'll teach them." (AV pers. comm. 1986). She teaches what she "learned from her folks" to anyone who demonstrably embarks on the experience of doing it.

## Chapter IV

## BEING IN THE INDIAN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

## 1. Camp

One drives a mere fourteen kilometers from Arlee, Montana, into the first ridges of the foothills below Squaw Peak. The way is well marked with small signs with arrows: Agnes Vanderburg Culture Camp. Along the road, Valley Creek tumbles from artesian springs on Squaw Peak. One passes fields and pasture land, scattered homes. Power lines end at a Texas gate, and the forest begins -- fir, spruce and pine. A sign notifies the visitor that this is tribal land and a permit is required for non-members. A trail turns into the first meadow: Agnes' camp. At the far side of the clearing, Valley Creek (the running water for camp) edges the meadow. A huge old army tent dominates the centre: cook tent and general shelter/gathering place. Under the trees nearest the tent is Agnes' modest trailer; tipis stand in the clearing on either side of the main tent, other small trailers and tents shelter at clearing edges. Three old-fashioned outhouses offer relief at the edge of the trees -- the only permanent buildings.

The learning environment has a structure, but it is different from other structured learning situations that any given camper, Indian or non-Indian, is likely to have

experienced. The first and main component of the structured aspect is that on a date agreed upon by Agnes and the Flathead Culture Committee, Agnes moves to Valley Creek. Agnes goes camping, and from that moment on, the "school" is open, because she is there. The only rules are: no alcohol or drugs are allowed at camp, and the camp is open to everyone, without charge. These rules are always part of articles in local or national media coverage.

There are unadvertised rules too, that new arrivals quickly catch on to from hints or comments by the cook or other campers. Some of these rules are that each camper or group is responsible for their own breakfast, but campers are expected to contribute groceries for the midday and evening communal meals. No one is turned away if they don't contribute, but lack of contribution is noticed and privately commented upon. These meals are cooked on the wood stove in the main tent and are eaten communally -- everyone is called for the meals and is expected to eat together. Less discussed, but equally expected, are awareness of garbage (the campsite is extremely clean), fire safety measures, sensible pet handling, and courteous quiet after dark (e.g. you may stay up all night if you wish, but with awareness that others are resting).

Other aspects that I associate with overt structure include the fact that, in addition to extra tents, tipis, tarps, a cookstove, and miscellaneous camping equipment, Agnes always brings her hide-work tools, and numerous unworked hides that have been saved over the winter for camp. She has a guest book that every arrivee must sign, is aware of where it is, and makes sure each visitor's name and address gets in it. The camp roles of cook (hired each spring) and security man (Agnes' son V.) are visibly ongoing. Meals appear consistently, and V. spends part of each night patrolling for game or bears (human marauders are rare but are guarded against: V. is usually armed).

There is a carefully designed learning structure operating at camp, and it falls into the area that Susan Philips calls "invisible culture" (Philips 1983:12). The structure of everything at camp is Indian. The non-Indian camper is in Indian country for sure.

In a parallel situation, an Indian person enters a white school and knows it's Anglo country. For both, the physical environment and social interactions are really different. Philips argues that, for those coming into the unfamiliar learning environment and teaching structure, "this difference makes it more difficult for them to then comprehend [verbal and non-verbal] messages conveyed through the American school's Anglo middle-class modes of organizing classroom interaction" (Philips 1983:4). The



same consequence of difference applies in reverse for the non-Indian relationship to the Indian learning environment.

The Indian structure is operating the learning environment at Valley Creek. This structure exists in Agnes' Salish high-context way and presence, is not readily observable, and is a part of what low-context white campers must unravel in order to function as learners in the camp environment. Learning is available, and not in a form that non-Indian learners expect (there are not scheduled classes, activities, or lectures, for instance).

A primary characteristic of the learning structure at camp is: availability. The camp is there. Indians go there. Word has gotten out that non-Indians are allowed and even welcome. So people come for the availability of Indian cultural information, and the availability of the opportunity to participate.

## 2. Going to Valley Creek: Non-Indian learners entering the Indian learning environment

Let us look at a typical morning in camp, and a white learner's arrival. Even in midsummer, the sun doesn't come over the northeastern ridge before 9:30 a.m.. People get up late, unless they have a hide in process. In the morning before 11:00, campers usually stay in their private enclaves to take care of matters such as personal hygiene,

hand laundry, house- (or tipi-) keeping, reading or letter-writing, and private conversation.

The typical and eager non-Indian tends to have awakened in the valley below where sunrise is very early, and he or she drives into camp between 9 and 10 a.m. He or she may have to wait for an hour or so before being greeted by the general population. Agnes' trailer door is usually open by 11:00.

Most arrivees ask for Agnes right away, and are either directed to Agnes, if the morning is advanced, or to wait, given coffee by one of the small enclaves that may be stirring. Thus a first impression may include a lengthy wait, and frequently an assumption that "nothing is happening" (Crow pers. obs. and interviews 1982-1986). As campers emerge from the private into the communal dimensions of camp, several things happen. People bring their beadwork to a table in the main tent, and begin sewing. Agnes usually takes her place at the head of the table nearest the door of the tent (the beadworkers usually sit with her). Hide-workers are half-hidden at the forest edge, scraping, or else have hung up their hides for tanning in the trees near Agnes' trailer. Everyone has something to do, and this fact may not be readily apparent to the non-Indian arrivee.

The newcomer usually speaks to Agnes first, before interacting much with other campers. The other campers are

aware of the arrival, but give respectful space for the person to converse with Agnes. This can appear to the non-Indian as being ignored, because the beaders keep beading, the tanners keep tanning. No big display of welcome occurs. If the visitor is planning to pitch a camp, Agnes suggests where the tent, tipi, or trailer be placed. The Tribe usually pitches several tipis at Valley Creek; if there is an available tipi, an unequipped visitor will be given the opportunity to use it.

If the newcomer asks questions about what she teaches, or makes a comment about hide-work, beading, or other cultural activities, Agnes often laughs and says things like, "Well, we do everything here." She does not usually tell the newcomer how to begin; once in a while she will show the newcomer unworked hides that are available, or take him or her to where someone is tanning near her trailer.

At this point, the newcomer is left alone to establish a shelter/headquarters. Re-entry to the group depends on the time of day. If the arrival has been in the morning, at noon the arrivee is advised personally (by one of the younger campers) when lunch is ready. To many white arrivees, this advice is not always perceivable as a directive to come and eat. Many newcomers, not knowing the unspoken rule about communal lunch and dinner, contrive to

eat alone. Someone, but almost never Agnes, will inform them that they'd better eat with the group (sometimes adding information about the insult that they have just delivered by refusing to eat with Agnes).

After a meal, the beaders bead, the hide-workers work. Usually the newcomer gravitates to the main tent and sits by Agnes. Agnes is always willing to talk, but if the newcomer is a question-asker, conversation usually grinds to a halt. At this point, the arrivee is thrown onto his or her own resources, with individually varying response. Opportunity (availability) is bounded only by accessible supplies and by the scope of culture. It is up to the learner now -- whether to bead, to start a hide, to do anything at all, to get to know Agnes and other campers.

Some learners, at this point, feel left out. They can see that everyone else is busy with a project, but no one is telling them what to do, or how to begin. A few isolate themselves. Others sit with the sewers, talking about what is being done, asking questions. One white woman sat for two days with the beaders, re-iterating how she wants to learn to bead "someday". Finally, she perceived that she could do it now, asked for help, and began sewing. Some newcomers, not quite able to see that everyone is busy with a project, carry forward a sense that "nothing is happening", again because no one tells them what is

happening, what to do or how to begin. This latter type usually does not stay at camp very long.

No one will tell a newcomer what to do, because no one knows what the person wants out of being there, or what they want to do, or if indeed they want to do anything -- maybe they have come to relax and enjoy being at Valley Creek. So the person is not insulted by being told; direction at this point would interfere with the basic human freedom of choice that is respected at camp. The person must realize for him or her self that at camp there are no expectations; there is complete freedom to choose what to do. That realization is the first learning experience at camp for many whites. One worried newcomer "...immediately found out that no one expected him to do anything or be anything except who he was, and to enjoy what he was doing." (Therriault, pers. int. 1985).

Without exception (that I have observed) white newcomers approach the camp and Agnes with visible apprehension. This is displayed in nervous gestures, repetitive assertions to Agnes about who they know or who advised them to come, furtive looking around, and apologizing both verbally and with body language. To investigate this hesitancy and nervousness, I had conversations with several non-Indian visitors and learners about their experience of coming to Valley Creek. The

following section details both some of their comments and some of my own observations.

S. lives in nearby Dixon, Montana, a white woman in her thirties. I told her I was writing about non-Indian learners, and she immediately volunteered that she feels trepidation every time she approaches Agnes' camp. On her first visit the feeling was intense; she was very aware of arriving at an Indian camp. The trepidation intensified as she walked over to meet Agnes. S. said, "When you approach a person who has inner peace, you are thrown up against your own inner peace question, and you become scared. So it requires a certain amount of facing that [inner peace question] to come here."

U., a German woman in her twenties who resides in Montana, drove into camp while I was working a freshly scraped hide dry near Agnes' trailer. Agnes was sitting in a folding chair near my work. U.'s manner was self-apologetic, tentative, and self-effacing as she approached us. She repeated at least twice who told her about the camp and that she decided to come. Agnes was very casual with her, merely told her to set up her tent, and gestured in the general direction of where to pitch up. U. seemed to want reassurance, and Agnes didn't give overt sign of that.

Several days later, I interviewed U. about how it was for her to arrive at camp. U. said that the Indian

acquaintance who told her about Valley Creek didn't prepare her by telling much about camp, "just told me to to come up and see what's going on here."

I asked, "So how did you feel when you first got here?"

U. responded, "Very insecure. Just very insecure...yes. I just didn't know how to approach somebody like Agnes because I'd heard that she's a very knowledgeable and just a very sacred person, and I don't know how to approach such a person.

"When P. first told me I should come up here, he hadn't been here before. He said, 'I never had the honour of meeting Agnes myself.' All the persons who talked about her were really very respectful.

"Everybody was referring to her with so much respect that I just had the feeling that she's a very very special person. Also I read these books about Indian elders, that they want or need to be respected in a certain way, that you can really offend them by not following certain habits, certain ways, that you can do something wrong and do some harm with it. And I just don't know what - would that be for her... That's why I felt a little bit uncomfortable here about my own behaviour. Because I don't know how many mistakes I'll make. And I don't want to be offensive, or just like an elephant in a glass shop. So this is why I

was so insecure when I first got here... I didn't know what to do!"

Three days later, at the time of our conversation, U. had relaxed considerably. She had begun a beadwork project, and was doing so well with her sewing that Agnes had started calling her "Edna" -- the name of a respected beadworker on the reservation. U. said that after she observed how other people at camp acted and reacted, she perceived how to manage her own behaviour, and began to feel more comfortable.

Agnes' acceptance had become evident to U., but the feeling of insecurity was not entirely gone. "I know ... she does accept me. With my mistakes. But I still know that I have to learn alot...that I probably do make alot of mistakes. But I want to learn, and I will."

J. and R. are white women in their thirties, friends, who live near Arlee. In 1985 they visited me at camp. They were in a hurry, stayed for only about half an hour, sat in the main tent for a short time, and did no more than shake hands with Agnes. In summer 1986, they decided to come to camp and see if they could stay for a week-end. When they first arrived, they pulled in and parked near the tipi belonging to another friend of theirs who was camping. They went into the main tent, and there was a verbalized uncertainty about camping here. "We'd like to stay for the week-end if that would be alright..." More uncertainty



showed up in their non-verbal behaviour -- foot shuffling and light laughter -- a 'don't want to intrude' attitude.

They stayed for the week-end and both got involved in the beadwork option. They came back the following week-end, and unhesitatingly knew where to pitch their tent, and what to do. They beaded and got to know more of the campers. That Sunday evening, they voiced reluctance to leave, and a hope that their schedules would allow them to return the following week-end. On the next Friday evening, they drove in, both truck windows open, and they were waving out the windows, shouting, "We made it!" They were greeted with welcoming smiles and waves. The certainty of welcome and acceptance was fully functioning for them; they not only felt completely at ease arriving, they were confident in their membership in the camp community.

### 3. Getting Involved with Learning

As soon as it occurs to the newcomer to express a desire to do, as in "Agnes, I want to bead," or "I want to make a drum," there is a change in the quality of Agnes' attention. " 'I told 'em anybody wants to learn just do it. ... If you don't do it you're never gon' learn. I says that's the way my mother us'ta tell me, do it, finish it. They quit and I says do it.'" (Beck 1982:60)

She responds to beadwork intention by starting the person out right away (or, if she is busy helping someone

else, referring the person to an experienced beadworker at hand). " 'Take a small project not a great one.' I says, 'After you get good then you start on a big one' " (Beck 1982:60-61). "I just -- put the beads on the table. And each [learner] I have to show them how t'thread their needle, tie knot. And they start. Give them piece of whatever they want t'start in on their beadin'." (AV pers. int. 1985).

If the expressed intention is to work-on-hides, whether for buckskin or rawhide (rawhide for drums or parfleches), Agnes will point to the pile of unworked hides under the trees behind her trailer. "Go pick out your hide." Agnes almost never goes beyond the immediate step in her verbal directions. To her, it does not make sense to describe the entire process to one who will not have any experience from which to understand what she would say. If the learner does the step at hand, and is ready for the next step, there will be further verbal information.

The aspect of arriving at camp for all of the non-Indians, that made it possible for them to begin participating, is the palpable feeling of acceptance that Agnes communicates. To varying degrees, the other campers also let the newcomers know that they are welcome and accepted. The being accepted for you, even if you are a

stranger, is a new and refreshing experience for the non-Indian, who is used to being in a society where there are many expectations and frequent conditions to meet before one can be sure one is accepted.

## CHAPTER V

## THE TASK: WORKING-ON-HIDES

## 1. Hides as Cultural Focus

To Agnes, hide-work is the main thing that she teaches (AV pers. comm. 1978). "One of the reasons I started up [this camp] was so people could come and learn to work on hides. People're always comin' to me wantin' moccasins up to their knees...but they don't know nothin' about hides. It's hard work!" (AV pers. comm. 1986)

Within the context of non-Indian learners' experiences at camp in general, this study focuses on whites learning to work-on-hides. Hide-work is the primary subject available to learners at Valley Creek. Knowledge of the hide-work process is critical, before an ethnographer can document interactions in the learning of hide-work.

Working-on-hides involves "goal-oriented tasks and strategies" requiring "conceptual organization" (Dougherty and Keller 1982:763-764). Although the progressive stages of work can be generally named and described, the relationships among these units are a "...part of a taken-for-granted world that belong within a system of open possibilities. Open possibilities suggest shifting, creative organizations of knowledge" (ibid.:764).

Hide-work and the learning process involved, can also be identified as a cultural focus. Elaine Jahner discusses

Melville Herskovits' definition of cultural focus, commenting, "A cultural focus encompasses values so central to the culture that they affect the direction of culture change. . . . Gradually, what were once reinterpretations of an older structure tend to become interpretations based on the current social order" (Jahner 1980:144). Agnes' camp itself, as well as the doing and teaching of hide-work, are at the same time reinterpretation of older structures, and also emergent facets of the modern social order.

Hide-work forces the non-Indian learner to act within a Salish "system of specialized knowledge" organized into "constellations" (Dougherty and Keller 1982:768). Organization and contents of specific constellations are completely unknown to the non-Indian neophyte, as are the task-features involved in their production. Most whites could not "figure out" how to do this task, not and do it in the Indian way. Until they do the work-as-shown for a long time, they literally cannot think like that. Consistently, when white learners try to guess the next thing to do, they are wrong.

The personal experience of working-on-hides is two-fold, entailing both a state of mind:  $t\dot{s}t\dot{o}ntex^w$ , "you got to take care of [your hide]", and a state of activity:  $qs\ k^wul\dot{o}m\ \dot{q}ett$ : [she] on-going working animal skin

(Crow 1984:2). Taking care of hide puts a person 'on the line'; is a metaphor for the cultural experience.

I asked Agnes, "Do you think a person could go so far as to say that it it changes a person inside too..."

She replied, "Sure!"

I persisted, "...if they learn that and if they do it right, they change..." She interjected, "Yeah." I finished, "...themselves?"

"That goes with your work. It helps you fer a lot of things... Jus' like you're thinkin' about -- you wan' get done with the hide 'n what you're gon' do with the hide. Then lot o' things that you're thinkin' about, it kinda fades away. Then after you get done, it's really a big thing to learn how for hide."

In the process of hide-work, the learner goes through personal, cognitive, and spiritual lessons in persistence and commitment -- lessons that are largely unavailable in any other form today, and which represent training in values that are essential for cultural continuity. Unless the person learns those lessons, the hide remains unfinished. There is no grey area to hide-work: you either get buckskin, or you don't.

Agnes says that when people ask her what she teaches at camp, she tells them "Everything!" That is because learners generally make their buckskin into something. A hide that isn't made into something is raw material for

"everything". Agnes emphasizes that since she started her camp, there are more Flathead community members participating in Indian dancing, and these people are using buckskin outfits that they have worked and sewn themselves.

Within the community of Indian learners, people who make buckskin for the first time immediately cut and sew the hide for moccasins. Subsequent projects usually include a buckskin dress for women, buckskin leggings for men. In native society, the Indian dance outfit has become one of the outer marks of personal commitment to traditional ways. To a native person watching the dancers, real buckskin makes a statement both direct and symbolic about a dancer's involvement with cultural tradition. If it is known that the dancer personally worked the hide and made the outfit, there is an additional respect in the perception of both the clothing and the wearer.

Non-Indians learning hide-work also usually make their first buckskin into moccasins.

## 2. The Steps in Working-on-hide

For the reader whose previous experience does not include hide-work, the hide-work process is set forth here. It would be easy for an ethnographer to not observe what happens: the work is repetitive and somewhat boring to watch. Observation of a continuous process is as difficult as describing one. Attempts have been made, but gaps are

almost inevitable in the description of a process that cannot be encapsulated in lexical lists (see Dougherty and Keller 1982). For example, David Young's description: The wet skin is draped over the pole and downward pressure is applied with a metal or rib 'beaming' tool." (Young 1985:57). He parenthetically discusses several alternative actions that may result from individual differences in hides, and resumes his description of the process with "After the skin is fleshed..."

In Young's article, the implication in this description is that nothing much is happening between starting the downward pressure until the next change of tool, or until the next stage of the process after the flesh is scraped off. In fact, a great deal is happening during the hours or days between that first stroke of "downward pressure", and arriving at "after the skin is fleshed".

For my generalized description of turning a hide into buckskin, I am using language adapted from translations of the Salish words used most commonly during hide-work (Crow 1984:4-5) and from the way we talk about hide-work at camp. Neophyte work-time estimations are included with each section (one day's work = 8 to 10 hours). The degree of sheer physical labour is harder to notate.



# I. Preparing the hide (neophyte work-time: 4-6 days)

The hide is put in water. You look at your hide. Every so often you go look at what you put in the water -- your hide. You don't want to leave it in too long or it'll get stink. After about two days, when it is ready, you take it out of water near the hide scraping pole. You drape the hide over one end of the pole and lean it against a tree. The tree holds the hide on the pole. Start scraping the meat side with your drawknife/scrapper. Move the hide around from time to time to change its position.

Start with the neck and scrape all the stringers off the meat side. For a beginner this will be about two days' work. At night you roll it up, set it in a dry bucket, and put it away where animals won't bother it.

When you finish the meat side, turn the hide over and put it on the pole. Keep a container of water handy to pour on the hide if it starts getting dry. Start with the neck and scrape the hair side. Unless you've cut the hair off with your knife, you'll have to get off three layers at once: the hair, the dark grain that the hair grows from, and the inner fatty grain under the dark grain. Scrape down to the real skin. Scrape the whole hide. For a beginner this will be two to three days' work. At night take care of your hide. Keep it cool so it doesn't spoil.

When it is already scraped, you hang it up. Tie it by the legs. Use your hand scraper to clean the loose hairs

off the hide, and to work it dry. Lean in to the hide. This is where you got to work hard; now you got to tan (the motion with the hand scraper). Work until it's dry. For a beginner this will be three to six hours. Fold the belly sides in and roll up the hide. Put your dry hide away in a pillowcase or other cloth. Plastic bags make hides spoil.

## II. Tanning (neophyte work-time: 3-6 days)

The creamy white stiff hide is now ready to tan [preserve and soften]. Take a handful or two of fresh brains. Chop them fine, then boil in about a quart of water for twenty minutes or so. Put your cooking into a big bucket. Add lukewarm water until it is deep enough to cover your hide -- not too much water. Mix it up with your hands, smashing any large pieces of brains. You put the hide in the brain water. You go look at your hide. When it is soaked through, you reach in the bucket and stretch the hide in the brains. Stretch every part of it, the whole hide every so often. Leave it in the brain water one night at the most, or it will get stink.

Take the hide out of the brains and wring the hide. Have a fence pole tied between two trees. Roll the belly edges of the hide towards the centre back. Throw the hide over the pole, and tuck the hanging legs together until you have a loop. Take a clean stick and put it in the bottom of your loop. Twist the stick until you can tie it to the

cross-pole. Your hide will be knotted and dripping. Put your bucket under the hide to save the brain water, and leave it for thirty minutes or so. Do this again at least two more times; turn the loop each time.

You take the hide down and you stretch the hide with one or more other people. Stretch it and turn it and stretch the hide again. Then tie it up by the legs again and work the hide dry and soft with the hand scraper. You have to lean into your work as hard as you are able. Use your whole arm. Pull and stretch on the hide. Turn and retie it often. Work mostly on the meat side and keep getting more meat stringers off. Tan, so it doesn't get hard. When it is still barely damp, you can pull the hide back and forth on a metal strap, softening and drying it. When there are only a few cool spots, you can take the hide and work it with your hands on your lap until it is completely dry. For a beginner this working the hide dry can take between one and two days, with almost no breaks. At night, roll up your hide and store it safely and in a cool place. For a damp hide, you can use a plastic bag to keep it from drying out.

The first time in brains the hide works dry but usually not soft. Warm your brain water or cook more brains. Put the hide in brain water again. When it is soaked through, again you stretch the hide in the brains. Don't leave it in brains as long this time. Wring the hide

and stretch it. Hang it up by the legs and work the hide dry and soft with your hand scraper. Now you have to really work on it: tan or it'll get hard. Resist the impulse to rest. A beginner will need another one or two days for each time the hide goes through the brain soaking and working dry.

Some hides dry soft after the second time in brains, some do not. Repeat the brain and tanning process until the hide is soft and dry all over. Most hides are light cream color; the texture varies according to the individual hide, from softer than silk velvet, to a canvas-like sturdy roughness.

### III. Smoking the hide: an optional step (neophyte work-time: 2 days)

When the hide is soft and finished, patch any holes with old denim. Leave one small hole open. Fold the hide the long way, front leg to front leg, back leg to back leg. Starting at the center back, sew the edges together along the back, around the hind legs, along the belly, and around the front legs. Leave the neck and shoulders open. You have sewn the hide into a sack. Now add a skirt to the open end. Use denim and make it about eighteen inches wide. For a beginner, this sewing will take about one and a half days.

You go out and gather a few bags full of rotten fir -- make sure there's no pitch left in it. Pick up a few dry willow twigs to start your fire. Inside, tie your hide sack to your tipi poles so that the skirt is hanging down and can fit snugly over your metal bucket. Put a few sticks in the hide to keep the sack open. Plug the remaining small hole with a twig or chunk of rotten fir.

Get a bucket of water to have near you in the tipi. Put your metal bucket outside and make a fire in it with your willow twigs. When the flames take, start adding handfuls of rotten fir until they catch and smoulder. Add more fir until you have lots of smoke. Run the bucket into the tipi and put the skirt over it. Now your smoke is going into the hide sack; if you sewed it tightly, the smoke stays in. Go outside and breathe, but stay with your hide. Be in the tipi, and make sure that the fire in the bucket doesn't burst into flames, or go out. Add more fir to keep lots of smoke coming. After twenty minutes, take the plug out of the small unpatched hole. Push the sides of your hide-sack together and use the open hole as a peephole to see what color the inside of your sack is. Keep checking about every five minutes or so.

When it is the color you want, take the skirt from the bucket, quickly putting a board over the smoking bucket. Rush the covered bucket outside. Untie the sack from your tipi poles, and run outside with it. Remove the ties, turn

the sack inside out, and replace the ties. Take the hide-sack back inside, tie it to the poles, and bring the bucket in. Tuck the skirt firmly over the bucket and plug your peep hole. Check the color after ten or fifteen minutes. When the color is right, cover the bucket, run it outside. Untie your hide and take it outside so the smoke can escape. Take off the skirt and rip out the stitches that make the sack. Remove the hole patches. For a beginner, smoking the hide takes between one half and one whole day.

At last, your hide is finished. You can put your hide away, or cut it to make something.

The above description, although lengthy, is general in the sense that it only covers major constellations of task-specific knowledge. Within any moment of the process, situations may arise requiring particular actions that cannot be predicted or encapsulated in a rough "how-to" synopsis. After ten years of working-on-hides, I am still experiencing Agnes pulling new (to me) tricks out of her memory/creative knowledge, to handle difficulties that individual hides present.

### 3. The Importance of Hides

Repeatedly in the research for this project, Agnes and I went over the question of the importance of hides to the Flathead way of life. In many forms, I asked the question,

"Why are hides the main thing?" She invariably began her answer by emphatically stating, "Everything what they had, was hides." To my quizzical expression, she would repeat, "Everything." And then we would go over it, again and again. Moccasins (protection for the feet). Houses (tipis -- shelter from the elements). Clothing of all kinds (protection against sun or cold). Bags and cases to carry tools and food. Bedding. Cradle board coverings. Children's toys cut from hide and stuffed with deer hair. Swings. Cooking kettles made from elk hide. "They didn't have no stores, factories. If they had a thing, they used hide to make it."

The subject of hide-use became fun for us both, as we tried to sneak up on some cultural domain that did not involve hides. "Men's life, besides their clothes," I suggested. She thought a moment, chuckled, and began her list. "Saddle cover. Saddle blanket. Their rope. Arrow case. Wraps for the bow. Then rawhide -- drums, snowshoes, suitcase. Everything."

"What about tools, the toolmaker?" I asked. "Womens made their own." "But the weapons--" I insisted, sure that we'd found a hide-free domain at last. "Mostly they used arrows to hunt," she chuckled, "and meat comes wrapped in hide..." So with tool production we were only one step removed from hides, and it led right back to them.

Spiritual activities also involved hides: hides cover a sweatlodge, or a ceremonial winter lodge; drums were an essential part of a men's ceremonial preparation for military excursions. I said, "Agnes, are you telling me that you can't even have a war without hides?" She smiled and nodded, eyes sparkling. "Everything. Everything what they had, was hides."

I finally had to see it: "Everything what they had, was hides." Material culture showed up in a new light for me, as I began to perceive the continuous part of daily life and the network of activity that hide-related production was. A finished hide, or one prepared for rawhide, is only a beginning. Unless you do something with it, it is just a piece of buckskin. Hide-work leads to multitudinous other productions of use, value, and beauty. Knowledge of how to work-on-hides is not isolated from other cultural domains; a person who has been through the hide-learning process embodies not only potential for creating almost all aspects of physical culture, but also has been changed by the process itself.

The hide-process is tied to art and artistic production -- an area of inquiry that is too vast for the scope of this study, but must at least be recognized in passing. The "everything" that Agnes and other hide-workers make, are art objects. In Flathead culture, there may be only "one way" to make, for example, a cradle board



cover. Yet within that one way, each one is different. The cultural and artistic meaning of the object is tied to the maker, "...part of processes from which it cannot simply be lifted for inspection" (Fabian 1980:291). To understand the significance of the object we must also understand its maker and that individual's interactions with other people (Jones 1975:8-9). Without my knowing Agnes and having been her student-in-process with hides and what there is to do with them, I would not have been able to observe the hide-work learning activities and language at camp with much understanding.

## CHAPTER VI

## DATA AND ANALYSIS

To establish the intercultural nature of the interactions I studied, and to provide the theoretical base for this analysis, I use frame analysis in the sense described by Charles Fillmore in his "Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language" (1976). The frame is a "...structured way of interpreting experiences" (Fillmore 1976:20). Fillmore pursues "the workings of language" (ibid.:29), studying the complexity of the experiential, interactional frame vis a' vis the complexity of the utterance frame.

Interactional frames are categories. The categories are "...of the distinguishable contexts of interaction in which speakers of a language can expect to find themselves, together with information about the appropriate linguistic choices relevant to these interactions" (Fillmore 1976:25). The appropriate linguistic choices are revealed in the utterance frame.

The intercultural "workings of language" frame that applies to my data is the well-documented fact that English culture and speakers organize thought and language in threes, while American Indian cultures and speakers organize thought and language in fours, cf. Atkinson

(1984), Witherspoon (1977), and Kintsch and Green (1978). I have analysed three types of my linguistic data within the three v.s. four frame. One type is that of story -- Agnes performing and the non-Indian learner hearing/response. The second type is directive -- Agnes telling the learner what to do, and non-Indian comprehension. The third type is that of encouragement. I call these utterances attitudinal -- they are from both learner and teacher during moments of flagging learner enthusiasm. Bear in mind that these three areas do not only occur as separate and distinguishable. Often, for instance, a story is attitudinal or directive, or both; an attitudinal or a directive interaction may result in a new narrative being added to the repertoire of Camp stories.

### 1. Stories

Agnes tells stories -- they emerge constantly. They come out in response to direct questions, in response to something she has observed or what someone tells her about, or events in the context of the momentary happening. She is a lively speaker and her manner of speaking exudes warmth, caring, and humor. Sitting listening to Agnes is one of the most fun and personal aspects of Camp. These times usually are occupied with handwork and conversation. Sometimes small groups sit with Agnes near someone who is working a hide dry. The group sews, talk falls out,

stories are told, and the hide-worker is supported by the company.

Agnes' performance of relevant-to-the-life-at-hand stories "...offers...enhancement of the experience [and] binds the audience to the performer" (Bauman 1977:9). One result of this "binding" is that new hide-workers are recruited. In Agnes' stories, there is obvious approval and implied status-improvement regarding learning to make buckskin. The potential neophyte is influenced, and moves from hearing about the process to doing the process.

In Agnes' stories fours appear with regularity, and there are several different ways they show up. What I call common fours emerge in Agnes' stories, in sequences of four events, four characters (usually Agnes and three others), lists of four, or four descriptive statements. Noticeable about the common fours is the infrequent use of "and" as a stringing device.

Slightly more complex in Agnes' talk are what I define as simple repetition fours. These involve repetition of the third segment to introduce the fourth. In this example, she had mentioned an "Indian flashlight" made with pitch. I asked her to tell me about it.

1. "They tie it together,
2. they burn it,
3. tie it on round,
4. round their head."

This kind of repetition is typical of Agnes' speech, and incidences appear in the taped interviews with my other two Flathead advisory committee members.

One other example of simple repetition is included here (the three dots indicate a longer pause than a comma would signify). During a story about a past hide-learner at work, we find:

1. "Her hide was just like your last one ...
2. there was jus' little places kind o' not wet,
3. jus' kinda cold ...
4. cold feelin'."

Another kind of repetition occurs to make the four. I call this complex repetition because the repeated phrase serves more than one purpose. In addition to completing the fourth, it leads into the next sequence of four. For example, in response to a question about how fur robes were cleaned in the past:

1. "They put a pole on tree
2. 'n get a stick
3. and beat on it,
4.  
& > beat on it
- 1.
2. then they turn it round ...
3. they get it clean.
4. They had way t'get it clean."

White learners' four-related reactions to stories include perceiving the stories as slightly disjointed (i.e. skipping around) and as being incomplete. They have trouble remembering the stories. If they try to repeat "just what did Agnes say?", the "gist" fades away (see Kintsch and Greene 1978:6 & 10). Sometimes, the non-Indian listener (myself included, much to my consternation when listening to the tapes!) interrupts Agnes after the third in a sequence. However, the teaching reference and message of the stories are more readily received and understood across the cultural gap than are her directive teaching utterances.

## 2. Directives

The whites frequently do not catch on to teacher-utterances that actually tell the learner what to do next in the task at hand. These utterances are sequenced; they derive from the hide-work process. Some directives are task information, for example, "Scrape the meat side first" or "Cook some brains in water".

Other directives, however, are hint-like. For instance, if the hide has been soaking in brain-water, she may say, "Did you check your hide?", meaning, in white English translation: "Your hide should have been checked by now" (cf. William Leap, passim, on Indian and white English). Some utterances are received as being offhand

suggestions, like "You better go check your hide" -- an utterance after which one white learner sat chatting for another half hour -- translates literally as: "Go check your hide NOW". These directives are organized in fours, yet I cannot state that that is the only difference present for the non-Indians.

In these directive frames, the learner (if a first-time hide-worker) lacks context for understanding the direction. Agnes tends to give directions in a low volume and pitch, in contrast with non-Indians' previous learning experiences in white schools, where directions are given in a slightly increased volume and raised pitch.

Agnes hints often in her speech. As might be expected in a high-context culture, there is a generalized proscription against telling someone what to do. The Scollons define this feature as "nonintervention" (1975:187-189). They noticed it in child-rearing; I found it in the teaching at camp. Agnes almost never uses the form "Don't". Ron Therriault described her teaching:

She doesn't say, "You can't do that." No one's ever told they can't do something here. They're just allowed to do it. And then if they're makin' a mistake, she will pick it up and show 'em, maybe a better way to do it. That better way's probably the right way, but there's not a negative way...It's a very positive atmosphere.

Agnes' noninterventive teaching utterances are positive: "Next time, try [whatever appropriate action]",

"Do it this way..." [showing], "You gotta [do whatever]", and "You better [take a certain action]". In interventive teaching, the negative comment preceeds the positive direction, for instance, "Don't do that, do this", or "Not like that...like this". The learner is interrupted and may feel discouraged. Agnes usually waits until the learner has thoroughly finished his or her mistake. Even then, the most corrective utterance she makes is, "You should have [done such and so]".

The noninterventive teacher offers the presence of enablement in the absence of negation. The absence of negation sometimes confuses a white learner. The question arises: how consistently do whites define how to do by first pointing out or eliminating how not to do?

### 3. Attitudinal Encouragement

Of the three utterance types I have used for analysis, the most understood between Agnes and her students are the emotional, attitudinal frames. These come out during the do or die crises in hide-work. Without exception, every hide-work learner, at some point in the task, reaches exhaustion, discouragement, incredulity at the scope of the task, panic, resistance to doing it at all, boredom, and muscle pain. The hand holding the tool is so numb it can't feel the tool; back neck and arm muscles are screaming; legs are watery and about to collapse; the mind is running



around crazily trying to find alternatives to persistence. The person desperately wants to find a way out, considers choosing to quit, seeks to discover a way to make the work less excruciating (which there isn't, without practice). These are spirit-bending moments in the initiation of the neophyte, moments of opportunity for inner change, the crux moments after which, if the student perseveres, nothing is the same in one's personal universe. At these times, Agnes keeps her students at the task with utterances that have not shown much variation over my years of working with her.

The three- and four- structure difference between utterances of Indian and non-Indian speakers are most marked and recurrent in the data of these attitudinal frames. Here is a list of repeated, almost universal utterance frames from each side. My analysis of these as fours and threes derives from studying the rhythm of how it sounds when spoken in context, in addition to the number of words or notions in the phrase.

Learner utterances:

"My | arm (back, neck, hand) | hurts."  
1           2                                 3

"Can	I	rest?"
1	2	3

"Is | it | dry?"      and/or      "Am | I | done?"  
       1     2     3                                  1     2     3

"I | might | quit." (as in ready to give up)  
1        2        3

Teacher utterances (n.b. when written, these seem to be imperatives; in sound, they are heard as stated information):

"Tan, | or it'll | get | hard."  
           1              2              3              4

"You | gotta | stay by | your hide."  
           1              2              3              4

"You | gotta | work | on it!"  
           1              2              3              4

"It's nothin' | to me | if you spoil | your hide."  
                   1              2              3              4

These utterances are quite correctly interpreted by the learner that there is no respite, no way out of it: one must keep working. Many do keep working, finish a hide, become persistent hide-workers, make "everything".

Noninterventive teaching interactions sometimes occur within an attitudinal frame. M. had been working on her hide at the scraping stage for three days. Her face was drawn and pale; her commitment to the process was visibly fading. She left her hide on the scraping pole, came to the group, collapsed into a chair near Agnes', and reached for a cigarette. In a few moments, Agnes turned to the beaders nearby, gestured towards M., and said to the company, "We're gonna find her dead on her pole." M. returned to her work before the cigarette was finished.

For communication achievement, the most successful interaction frames are the attitudinal -- the "gist"

(Kintsch and Greene 1978:2) gets past cultural differences in teaching style, linguistic repertoire and the three-four- organization. Agnes fully realizes that for the learner the hide-work is difficult and painful. She has empathy but she has no relenting; the learner correctly interprets Agnes' utterances: you keep working and get buckskin, or you don't.

The middle-ground of understanding is the story frame. Non-Indians occasionally have difficulty listening to the whole of a story, while at the same time being completely bound in to the experience of being with Agnes at Valley Creek.

The most frequently misunderstood frames are the directives, when the gist is often lost, and the learner, in order to continue, has to repeat a question or else go to another hide-worker to seek clarification.

Summary of the white learners in the three types of frames shows:

Directives. Whites do not hear the utterance as a directive; and the lexical meanings in specific directives are contextually unavailable to them.

Story performance. The narrative performance is warmly welcomed. The teaching reference is grasped. At the same time, the narrative itself is variously: interrupted, depreciated, or misremembered.

Attitudinal encouragement. Following the teacher's statement of what is, most hide-learners return to their task. The lexical meanings and the wider cultural theme are clear. The apparent simplicity of the utterance does not obscure the complexity of the situation: working-on-hide.

## CONCLUSION

### 1. Summary and Findings

At the Flathead Reservation in Montana, among a people considered "thoroughly acculturized" (Turney-High 1937:6), one little old lady decided to go camping. Ten years later, supported by her Tribe and by several of her senior students, that personal decision has become an opportunity for all comers to receive the transfer of cultural knowledge.

In olden times, no woman would have stepped forward to teach or be such a public figure. As Agnes pointed out to me, in the old days it would not have been necessary. Each woman had the knowledge that Agnes now carries and teaches. Each family's grandmother took care to teach her younger women; no one needed to go to someone else to learn.

In these modern days, there has been a dearth of grammas. Agnes did not set out to be everybody's gramma, or to become well-known. She went camping, and "it just happened" that that action resulted in the Agnes Vanderburg Culture Camp. There has, until recently, also been a dearth of learners. Agnes values what she knows, what her folks taught her, too much to restrict her teaching to Indians only. She has the practicality to see that if she

wants her knowledge to remain alive on earth, she must teach it to anyone willing to give it life.

She camps for about three months each summer, creates a modern Indian learning environment, and transfers her Indian Way to Indians and whites alike. My own experiences as one of Agnes' non-Indian learners, combined with my pursuits in Linguistic Anthropology, resulted in this study of whites learning the Indian Way.

Using Fillmore's (1976) interpretation of frame analysis, I have studied three types of communication events between white hide-work learners and one Indian teacher. The communication events chosen for analysis took place during working-on-hides, a task-oriented process requiring constellations of knowledge (Dougherty and Keller 1982) completely outside the learners' previous context.

I have provided extensive ethnography of the Indian learning environment, the non-Indians in it, hide-work, and hide-learning to establish the relationship of working-on-hides to wider cultural themes, and to emphasize how deeply immersed in Salish cognition the non-Indian hide-learner becomes. Gary Witherspoon (1977:3-5) discusses how performing human actions, "...whether dressing in a certain way, behaving in a certain way, or eating a particular kind of food in a special way, all convey messages about the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the persons who perform them."

The white learners' utterances exhibit a typical speech organization using threes; Agnes (and other Flathead community members) organizes her utterances in the patterns of four common to many other American Indian cultural groups. That this difference is found in at least three kinds of talk at Valley Creek proves the biculturality of the situation at camp.

Within the teaching interaction frame that I have called "directives", learner comprehension is minimal, due to the students' unfamiliarity with the four-part utterance, as well as lack of context, and, I suggest, because of the noninterventive teaching mode with its absence of negative explanation.

The teaching stories emerge constantly, in four-part structure. They are tuned to the individuals' current events with hide-work. Agnes' narratives serve several purposes. Some stories are directive, and hint noninterventively at what to do: what another hide-worker did, was told to do, or should have done in the case of a certain hide at a certain stage. Other stories are attitudinal, recounting moments of despair, complaint, success or failure, and what the learner was told. The white students' grasp of the narrative performance is partial. The performance itself is at the same time warmly received, depreciated due to valuation of anecdote versus

valuation of abstract conceptualization, interrupted and/or received as confusing because of the white predisposition to threes. The teaching reference in the content of the narrative gets across to the white learner, who, however, may later not be able to recall exactly what was said.

Communication is the most successful during the interactions I call attitudinal. Marked four- versus three-part speech events occur during the teacher-learner interaction at these crucial success/failure moments, times when the emotional attitude of the learner must be addressed. The speech events during these moments are "...an aspect of a linguistic system [consisting of] ways in which the language user's cognitive and interactional frames are linked up with linguistic material" (Fillmore 1976:29).

The activity hide-learning, particularly at the stage when the learner falters, is a complex interactional frame prepackaged in lexical meanings (ibid.). During this stage of the work, there are a very few lexical configurations likely to be uttered by the teacher. The task itself, the progress of the hide, and the learners' pain, are a recurrent part of the "complex interactional frame". The "prepackaging" is the recurring stages: working-on-hide.

There is more variation in the learners' utterances than in Agnes': individual learners have unique personal ways of handling the stress of hide-learning. These



personal complaints, and Agnes' unrelenting, warmly humorous encouragement are moments in the workings of language wherein the complexity of the experiential interactional frame can be studied vis a' vis the complexity of the utterance frame.

To the non-Indian, who is in context working-on-hide, the lexical meanings do not reflect all the important aspects of the moment (Dougherty and Keller 1982), but the core meaning is clear: either you get buckskin, or you don't. Whether the learner goes on to complete his or her hide, or chooses to let it spoil, the learner comprehends. The meaning is successfully communicated despite a situation of marked linguistic and cultural differences. The apparent simplicity of the utterances does not obscure the complexity of the experiential frame: working-on-hides.

## 2. Implications

While I do not presume to answer or resolve the question of meaning convergence raised by the Scollons, this study contributes to consideration of the possibility that a core of meanings exists which is independent of language (Scollon and Scollon 1979:140-145). The aspects of my work relevant to that question are to be found in the accepting friendliness pervading Agnes' relationship to her students, and in the meaning communicated during

attitudinal exchanges marked by extreme linguistic difference.

Within the broad range of bicultural, bilingual education issues, numerous studies that focus on American Indian topics address communication problems encountered by Indian students within the white school system. The learning environment at Valley Creek has provided an opportunity to study bicultural education with the reversed roles of Indian "school system" and white students. I suggest there are implications in this material for white educators, and, by extension, for wider intercultural communication concerns. The positive atmosphere Agnes creates with utterances that enable in the absence of negation, keeps her students at their most arduous task.

Finally, this paper addresses the persistence of Indian culture in modernity. The culture has not vanished nor (despite Turney-High 1937:6) have the people been thoroughly acculturized. The Salish people at Flathead have indeed adapted to changing times. Also, the Indianness is in place. Agnes and her three-speaking white students are different. In the four-part organization of Agnes' (and other Flatheads') talk, there are cultural differences extant.

Where were Agnes and Jerome Vanderburg when the ethnologists came? Turney-High arrived, seeking evidence of cultural survival from the past. Finding but little, he

recorded valuable memories from elderly informants.

Jerome, Agnes (and others like them, in 1937, when he came around) didn't get a chance to meet him (AV pers. comm. 1987). The Vanderburgs were probably camped in a favorite mountain spot, doing what they were supposed to do: hunting, and taking care of hides.

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